

JUNE 20, 2002

**SCHAKOWSKY STATEMENT DURING HOMELAND SECURITY DIRECTOR RIDGE APPEARANCE BEFORE GOVERNMENT REFORM COMMITTEE**

***"CONGRESS HAS DUTY TO ASK TOUGH QUESTIONS AND DEMAND SATISFACTORY RESPONSES WHILE REVIEWING PRESIDENT'S PROPOSAL TO CREATE DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY"***

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Thank you, Mr. Chairman for convening this important hearing today to review the Administration's proposal to create a new Department of Homeland Security. I am pleased to finally have an opportunity to discuss this subject with our witness, Governor Ridge, in a public hearing.

I believe that there is unanimity of agreement among members of Congress that we must change the way we conduct the business of national security in this country. The recent revelations of the failure of our intelligence community and the Administration to adequately prepare for or prevent the 9/11 attacks has led many of us to that conclusion.

We need to make changes to guarantee that a tragedy like September 11 never happens again.

As we begin the process of formally reviewing the President's proposal to create a Department of Homeland Security, we have a duty to ask tough questions and demand satisfactory responses. At the outset, a fundamental question each of us has and will continue to ask ourselves and the proponents of this new Department is, will it make us safer? To answer that question we must first take the necessary steps to identify what went wrong and how similar failures of our system can be prevented in the future. Then we must make a determination as to whether this new proposal addresses those problems.

It is not clear whether creation of a new Department of Homeland Security will guarantee that crucial intelligence and analysis would make it to those who most need to be familiar with it or whether the new agency will simply add another layer to the top of an already dense bureaucracy.

I am not convinced that our first priority out not to be addressing those clear failures that led up to September 11 before we address what may be longer term problems.

That is a fundamental issue on which all members clearly do not agree. Speaking strictly in terms of the President's proposal, I have several concerns that I hope Governor ridge can address for the Committee.

First, I am wondering how the Administration can be so sure about a plan to improve security in this country when a comprehensive threat assessment has not yet been completed. Without a comprehensive assessment of potential threats to our security and the assets we have to mitigate those threats, I do not believe we can move forward with absolute certainty in the wisdom of our actions.

The President has suggested that we transfer several existing agencies into one. Among those agencies are those which provide critical non-security related functions. Some have raised concerns that these critical functions may not receive the attention they deserve from a Cabinet Secretary whose primary charge is to protect the Homeland. Moreover, some have questioned the wisdom of placing multiple, and possibly competing, missions within the same department.

The President's plan does not include necessary protections for the rights of federal employees to organize, be represented by unions, and bargain collectively.

Relaxed procurement standards the President has put forth do not suggest that an adequate level of financial accountability will be instilled in the new department or that existing statutes governing procurement will be followed.

And the attempt to exempt the new agency from requirements of the Freedom of Information and Federal Advisory Committee Acts are cause for concern for members and the American public. We are talking about a new agency, a radical reorganization of the government, and a considerable amount of money. The public and the Congress should maintain their rightful oversight roles over this new agency and attempts to limit those rights should immediately end.

These are just a few of my many questions and concerns. Governor Ridge, welcome and thank you for taking the time to be here. I look forward to a worthwhile discussion on this critically important subject.